

Tule Lake Project (Tule Lake  
Relocation/Segregation Center) Jail  
Post Mile 44.85, State Route 139  
Newell  
Modoc County  
California

HABS No. CA-2279

HABS  
CAL,  
25-NEW,  
1-

PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey  
National Park Service  
Western Region  
Department of Interior  
San Francisco, California 94102

HABBS  
CAL,  
25-NEW,  
1-28

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

TULE LAKE PROJECT (TULE LAKE RELOCATION/SEGREGATION CENTER) JAIL  
HABS No. CA-2279

**Location:** Post Mile 44.85, Newel, Modoc County,  
California.

Quad: Tulelake, Calif.-Oreg. 15'

**Date of Construction:** 1944. Subsequent to closure of the  
Tule Lake Project in 1946, most metal  
elements--cell doors, window bars, wiring  
elements, etc.--have been stripped from  
the building.

**Present Owner:** California Department of Transportation  
District 2 Maintenance Branch  
P.O. Box  
Redding CA

**Present Use:** Vacant.

**Significance:** The jail at the Tule Lake Project was part  
of the Stockade, or Area B, a detention  
center established by the U.S. Army in  
late 1943 following a series of  
altercations between Japanese-American  
"evacuees" and staff of the War Relocation  
Authority. The Tule Lake Project is  
listed as California Historical Landmark  
No. 850-2.

**Historians:** John W. Snyder  
Chief, Architectural and Historic Studies  
Stephen D. Mikesell  
Staff Historian  
Architectural and Historic Studies  
California Department of Transportation  
Office of Environmental Analysis  
650 Howe Avenue, Suite 400  
Sacramento CA 95825

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

Of the ten relocation centers established in the early days of World War II to confine persons of Japanese ancestry, the Tule Lake Project has a unique history. The War Relocation Authority (WRA) established the Tule Lake Project, also known as the Tule Lake Relocation Center, Tule Lake Segregation Center, and Tule Lake Relocation/Segregation Center, opening the camp on May 27, 1942; the facility received its first group of Japanese-American "evacuees" on that date.

This was the largest of the WRA projects. Designed for a population of 16,000, the camp eventually saw that number grow to some 18,000 after 1943. In mid-July of that year, the WRA redesignated the Tule Lake Project as a "segregation center" in conjunction with the so-called "loyalty questionnaire" distributed through all the relocation centers by the WRA in early 1943. This questionnaire was poorly written and often accompanied by inadequate instructions, resulting in misinterpretation by many of the respondents. Those failing to respond in positive fashion to the loyalty questionnaire--fully 16 percent of the total population of the ten relocation centers--were transferred to Tule Lake during the rest of 1943. At the same time, Tule Lake "evacuees" who had responded positively to the loyalty questionnaire were either sent to other camps, or allowed to relocate outside the Military Defense area.

The chaotic shuffling of thousands of persons in and out of Tule Lake exacerbated tensions in the camp, tensions with which WRA administrators were poorly equipped to deal. As a result, the Tule Lake Project became the site of labor strikes, violent demonstrations, bloodshed, and murder, and the camp was placed under Army control from November 5, 1943 through January 14, 1944.

The history of the establishment of the Stockade at Tule Lake is best excerpted from Tule Lake Report No. 33, dated September 12, 1944:

Why Area was Established: The need for a place where troublemakers and those suspected of troublemaking could be segregated temporarily from the rest of the Japanese colony in the Tule Lake Center suddenly arose on the night of November 4, 1943, when gangs of young evacuee men swarmed through the administration area brandishing clubs and attacking WRA appointed personnel. The Army took control of the camp to restore order at the request of Project Director R.R. Best. A few days earlier, on November 1, a crowd of several thousand evacuees congregated at the administration building under the direction of certain leaders to back up the negotiating committee in their pressure tactics in a

meeting with Mr. Myer and Mr. Best.

Eighteen Japanese were caught in the administration area the night of November 4. The next day the Army, at the request of and upon information furnished by the Internal Security, started picking up other men in the colony on suspicion of being connected with the incidents of November 1 and 4, of inciting trouble or of carrying on subversive or obstructive activities.

At the time it was contemplated that the men picked up would be held temporarily in the isolation area and eventually the citizens would be transferred to Leupp or to a section of the Tule Lake Center fenced off from the rest of the camp and the aliens would be turned over to the Department of Justice or likewise isolated in a special section of the Tule Lake Center. A few months later the prospect of liquidating the entire population of the isolation area grew strong enough to cause the abandonment of these plans.

Administrative Authority for Area B: Administrative regulations for Area B were issued April 26, 1944, as Manual Section 110.15, which stated in part:

"In order to promote the orderly administration of the Center and to maintain peace and security for the residents, it will be necessary from time to time further to restrict the movement and activities of persons whose influence or actions may be disruptive of the operation of the Center. Such persons, after investigation and decision by the Project Director, will be transferred either to a separate area within the Center, designated herein as Area B, or to an isolation center outside the project. Since further separation of individuals is a purely administrative arrangement to secure the peaceful and orderly administration of the Center, only such investigation need be [sic] made as is requisite for an administrative determination by the Project Director."

Fact-Finding Committee: To make this investigation the Manual established procedure for setting up a Fact-Finding Committee consisting of the Assistant Project Director in charge of Community Management, the head of the Internal Security Section and the Project Attorney. In practice, the Fact-Finding Committee was more concerned with transfers out of Area than with transfers to the area.

The Manual further states (110.15.2) that "residence of any individual in Area B or in an isolation center shall be for an indefinite period."

Mail Censored: All mail going into and coming from Area B was subject to censorship under the Manual regulations. Likewise no visitors were permitted to persons in the area except by permission of the Project Director.

Army in charge November 5 to May 24: The Army, which assumed charge of the center on the night of November 4, was in charge of Area B until May 24. After the WRA assumed full charge of Area B, the Army continued to man watchtowers at three corners of the area. During Army control of Area B, the WRA Fact-Finding Committee and Internal Security made recommendations to the Project Director on the transfer of evacuees into and from Area B. The Project Director acted on such recommendations.

Growth of Area: The isolation area, officially called Area B and commonly called the stockade, was situated at approximately the same location northwest of the hospital for the entire period of its existence, November 5, 1943, to August 24, 1944. It grew in size from one Army tent to five barracks, a mess hall and a bathhouse. The final site covered about two-thirds of an acre. It was enclosed by a high wire fence.

During November 209 male evacuees were picked up and placed in Area B. In December, 107 were isolated in the area; in January, 41; in February, 22; in March, 2; in April, 5; and in May, 10, or a total of 396.

Transferring of evacuees from Area B back to the colony was started as soon as investigations could be made. In some cases the wrong person was picked up and he was immediately returned to the colony. Early release of other persons after examination of their dockets also took place. When it appeared that an individual could live peaceably in the main residential area, he was accordingly transferred. On May 31 the number in Area B had dwindled to 62 men.

Thus, in late 1943, following a series of altercations between evacuees and WRA staff, the U.S. Army stepped in and established a Stockade, known as Area B, as a detention center. This was comprised of several barracks, a bathhouse, and a mess hall. As noted above, this first Area B was located northwest of the hospital, a fortunate locational choice in view of the periodic hunger strikes of the stockade prisoners which necessitated occasional medical attention. The above-cited report also makes mention of the site of the present jail:

When the men returned to Area B from the hospital [Note: reference here is to mid-August 1944], the wallboard which had been placed on the fence of Area B on the side facing the

colony had been removed for use in the construction of the **new Area B in the west corner of the military area** [emphasis added].

This new stockade was located just south of the Motor Pool and was surrounded by a barbed-wire topped chain link fence, still in place. Immediately to the west were the barracks of the Military Police detachment. It appears that the jail may date from the second half of 1944, when the new Area B was established. While its exact function is not spelled out in WRA reports on the Stockade, it seems likely that it served as a maximum security facility within the Stockade. The jail was in use through mid-1945, and it may well have remained operational even after the end of World War II. Late in the war, Tule Lake was home to those evacuees who had requested repatriation to Japan. It was for this reason that this camp, unlike the other nine WRA camps, remained occupied after the conclusion of hostilities between Japan and the United States.

When the camp closed on March 20, 1946, its inhabitants scattered. Some of the evacuees returned to California to rebuild their lives, while others chose to start new lives in the East. Some, understandably distrustful of American justice, journeyed to Japan.

The California State Historic Landmark application summarizes the significance of the Tule Lake Project:

Tule Lake is a reminder to us of a regrettable portion of California and American history when a segment of the American population was segregated and imprisoned, their only crime being their ancestral [sic] lineage. More than 110,000 persons of Japanese ancestry, the majority of them native born American citizens, were uprooted from their homes in the Western United States and forced to live in one of ten tar paper cities that grew up overnight in desolate areas from California to Arkansas.

Although elements of politics, economics and the military all contributed to the evacuation and creation of these camps, Tule Lake is probably the most significant because it represents the struggle of a group of people. Despite all adversity, they were able to survive an experience which was all the more incredible because it occurred in a democracy. The strength and patience displayed by the internees is reflected in the art, literature and collective spirit which grew from the experience. More than anything else, Tule Lake is a tribute to the strength of the people who were forced to live there.

The Jail, with its history of imprisonment without due process,

mail censorship, and isolation in the midst of isolation, is a stark reminder of what must never happen again in America.

Datable graffiti remains extant on the cell walls, a poignant reminder of people and times past which must not be forgotten. Some are simply dates. Much is in Japanese and will require translation. One cell contains a poetic link to that time: "When the golden sun has sunk beyond the desert horizon and darkness followed, under a dim light casting my lonesome heart." One can stand today in that lonesome cell and gaze through the window at the bleak, sere beauty of that still-wild country, and sense what the writer was feeling.

In another cell, a group of names, ages, dates, and periods of incarceration remains: Mamoru Yoshimoto, 20, 5/24/45, 180 days, Kumamoto; Haruo Yokoi, 18, 6/17/45, 270 days, Nagoya; Masaki Nishii, 31, 5/24/45, 180 days, Kumamoto; Masaharu Yoshida, 19, 5/24/45, 180 days, Hiroshima. These were likely among those who had requested repatriation late in the war. One today can only wonder about Masaharu Yoshida of Hiroshima, his graffiti written less than three months before the dawn of nuclear warfare obliterated his home, and perhaps his family.

Today, little remains of any of the relocation centers; Tule Lake exhibits perhaps the most extant buildings. Still, within a year of the closure of the camp, the government disposed of the evacuees' barracks to area homesteaders by lottery; many of these can still be easily seen and identified as to their origins within a radius of a few miles of the former camp. At the site, five of the ten Motor Pool buildings remain, acquired, along with the Stockade, by the California Division of Highways (now Caltrans) in 1947 for use as a maintenance station. Adjacent to the Stockade, the former Military Police housing is now in residential use. A few warehouse structures lie well to the south along rail spurs. Little else remains: while streets can still be discerned, sagebrush and blowing sand have reclaimed much of their own.

## PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

The Tule Lake Project Jail is a one-story reinforced concrete structure, with exterior dimensions of 39' x 71'. It has a flat reinforced concrete roof with a two-foot projecting cornice. The interior partition walls are also of reinforced concrete. Reinforcing steel throughout the building is of 1/2" and 3/4", with the larger material also having served as the bars for the cells.

The building is divided into eleven rooms. There are four 9' x 12' cells along the west wall, and two similar cells along the

north half of the east wall. Along the north wall, and between the two groups of cells, is a room measuring approximately 19' x 25', presumably used by the detainees for recreation. Along the south wall are two large rooms, one likely used as a reception area, the other as an office. There are also small rooms in the center of the building. One, with heavy metal screening separating the detainees' area from the administrative area, was no doubt a visiting room. Nine-foot-wide hallways abut the cell areas.

As noted, each cell measures 9' x 12', with a 9' ceiling. A single 3' x 4' barred window opened to the outside. Each cell had a tier of three beds along each side wall, supported by cantilevered metal frames. In addition, each cell had a sink placed at the center of the back (outside) wall, and a toilet in one corner of the same wall. All metal elements and fixtures--doors, bars on windows, toilets, sinks, and bed frames--have been removed, though there are a number of the bed frames stored in one cell.

### PART III. SOURCES OF INFORMATION

- R. Daniels, *Concentration Camps USA: Japanese Americans and World War II*, New York, 1971.
- D. Thomas and R. Nishimoto, *The Spoilage*, Berkeley, 1946.
- U.S. War Relocation Authority, *WRA: A Story of Human Conservation*, Washington, D.C., 1946.
- "History of Area B at Tule Lake - The Stockade," Tule Lake Report No. 33, U.S. War Relocation Authority, Washington, D.C., September 12, 1944.
- "Application for Registration of Historical Landmark," California Department of Parks and Recreation, Sacramento, n.d.
- Telephone interview with Harold Jacoby, original head of internal security unit at Tule Lake, now retired in Stockton, California, 1986.